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State Releases Interstate 81 Rail Diversion Study

Bristol, Virginia – A study released today by the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation suggests that an additional 5% or 500,000 trucks annually could be diverted from Interstate 81 to rail if significant capital improvements are made to the rail system that serves the corridor in Virginia. "I-81 is a critical freight corridor for the entire East Coast," stated Karen J. Rae, Executive Director of DRPT. "We are taking a hard look with our partners at what transportation investments are necessary to keep I-81 safe for the people and businesses who use it."

The Department of Rail and Public Transportation and Federal Railroad Administration ordered the study to determine the feasibility of investment in the I-81 corridor and to answer three main questions: 1) Is there a marketplace demand for improved intermodal freight services in the corridor; 2) what type of service offering will generate the greatest diversion benefit to the corridor; 3) what level of public investment in rail intermodal will materially impact the level of highway commercial traffic for I-81?

The study looked at two scenarios; 1) a "Virginia Only" investment and 2) a twelve to fourteen state "Multi-State Corridor" investment stretching from Louisiana to New York. A "Virginia Only" investment of \$492 million could divert an additional 5% of truck traffic by 2020. The study also found that truck traffic on I-81 could be reduced by 30% by the year 2020 only if a multi-state investment of \$7.9 billion was made.

The study supports an approach of investing in both highway and rail options to reduce heavy truck traffic on I-81. "Clearly, this study suggests that rail investments should be considered as part of the solution in the I-81 corridor," stated Ms. Rae. "To achieve the greatest level of diversions would require a major multi-state effort."

The full report is available on line at www.drpt.state.va.us.

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